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ABSTRACT

This study examined the concerns and confidence of 10 educators (9 elementary and secondary school teachers and 1 school principal) as they adopted naturalistic assessment procedures. Participants enrolled in a 4-month graduate course and implemented various literacy assessment procedures in their classrooms. Data were collected through the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SCQ), interviews, confidence ratings, written narratives, and field notes from class discussions. Group results from the SCQ indicated a shift from "self" to "impact" concerns. Confidence ratings increased over time; narratives showed that participants were confident in their abilities to implement naturalistic assessment but were not confident about the success of naturalistic assessment beyond their classrooms. Factors that influenced confidence were identified and categorized as: (1) teacher uniqueness; (2) professional development; (3) significant others; and (4) teaching environment. The participants felt that naturalistic assessment empowered them as well as their students. Portraits were developed for each participant that demonstrated the importance of a supportive teaching environment to the success of naturalistic assessment. (Contains 1 table, 3 figures, and 15 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Naturalistic Assessment: Teachers' Concerns and Confidence

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Running Head -Teachers' Concerns and Confidence

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Naturalistic Assessment: Teachers' Concerns and Confidence

Abstract

This study examined the concerns and confidence of ten educators as they adopted naturalistic assessment procedures. Participants enrolled in a four month graduate course implemented various literacy assessment procedures in their classrooms. Data were collected through The Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ), interviews, confidence rating and written narratives, and fieldnotes from class discussions. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used for data analysis. Group results from the SoCQ indicated a shift from "self" to "impact" concerns. Confidence ratings increased over time; narratives showed that the participants were confident in their abilities to implement naturalistic assessment but were not confident about the success of naturalistic assessment beyond their classrooms. Factors which influenced confidence were identified and categorized: teacher uniqueness; professional development; significant others; and teaching environment. The participants felt that naturalistic assessment empowered them as well as their students. Portraits were developed for each participant which demonstrate the importance of a supportive teaching environment to the success of naturalistic assessment.

Naturalistic Assessment: Teachers' Concern and Confidence

As naturalistic assessment methods (Moore, 1983) are incorporated into classrooms, teachers are changing their educational practices. Depending on the locale, naturalistic assessment procedures, such as literacy portfolios, running reading records, kidwatching, etc., may be required by administrators in the same way that standardized tests have been in the past. For some teachers, the change may be too abrupt especially if appropriate inservice education has not occurred. In other instances, classroom teachers have taken the initiative to change assessment practices; they demand that naturalistic methods are accepted by administrators and boards of education as valid ways of knowing about student success. In either case, the issues of teachers' concerns about new assessment methods and their confidence in using them in their classrooms are brought to the forefront as attempts to change current educational practices are made. As with other educational innovations, the success of its implementation rests to a large degree with teachers' acceptance of naturalistic assessment as well as an educational environment which allows change to occur (Olson, 1985).

As a teacher educator, I am interested in the change process when teachers encounter an educational innovation. Teacher educators play an important role in the success of an innovation by helping teachers and administrators understand the process of change when they try to incorporate an educational innovation into the existing system. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to understand the process of change from primarily from individual teachers' perspectives, specifically when naturalistic assessment procedures were involved.

Rather than the term alternative assessment which is popular in the literature today, I have chosen to use the term naturalistic assessment. Its use implies that assessment takes place naturally in a classroom environment and that students are evaluated through naturally occurring tasks and activities. Moore (1983) originally defined naturalistic assessment in relationship to reading comprehension:

> Naturalistic assessment of reading comprehension is based on observing students' responses to reading situations during the

> school day. Educators through the years have given this approach labels such as ongoing evaluation (Austin, 1958), diagnostic teaching (Strang, 1964), kidwatching (Goodman, 1978) and diagnosis by observation (Cunningham,1982). In this approach, teachers observe students' behaviors in a variety of circumstances and with various materials. (p. 965)

In my graduate class the definition was applied to all aspect of English/Language Arts; portfolios and performance assessment were considered naturalistic assessment procedures.

Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical perspectives formed the foundation for this study. The first perspective was the "new science of educational assessment" (Berlak, Newmann, Adams, Archbald, Burgess, Raven, & Romberg, 1992). This contextual paradigm of assessment recognizes: the existence of multiple meanings of text within a multicultural society; the use of alternative methods for achieving construct validity; the inseparability of cognition, affective, and conative (persistence, determination and will) learning; and the need for local involvement and control of assessment. From this perspective, the current parametric paradigm, responsible for the institutionalization of standardized and criterion-referenced tests, must be challenged because it is a "major barrier to the renewal and restructuring of the nation's schools" (Berlak, 1992, p.12).

The second theoretical perspective which influenced this study was grounded in the research on teacher change and educational innovations (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987; Smylie, 1988; Fullan, 1990, 1991; Ohlhausen, Meyerson & Sexton,1992; Meyerson, 1993; Sarason, 1993). The basic concepts which influenced this study are: (1) change is idiosyncratic, complex, and ongoing and is greatly influenced by teachers' level of confidence or self-efficacy; (2) teachers are more willing to embrace innovations when they view new practices as better ways to meet the needs of students; (3) practices and teacher beliefs are interrelated; and (4) innovations are successful when teachers are supported in the change process over a long period of time. It is from these two perspective that the study was designed and

interpreted.

Methodology

During Spring, 1994, ten experienced educators (K-12) were enrolled in my graduate course, "Naturalistic Assessment in English/Language Arts". The participants were employed by the same large school district located in the Southwest and taught in a variety of situations at the elementary, middle, or high school levels. Nine of the participants were teachers; one was an elementary school principal who wanted to initiate naturalistic assessment methods in his school. All the educators were familiar with holistic approaches to literacy and had taken a course either in whole language or writing process previously. Several teachers were already implementing portfolios in their classrooms when the course began. Two high school English teachers used holistic and trait scoring to evaluate student writing.

Over four months, the participants engaged in a variety of activities. They explored various forms of naturalistic assessment such as performance assessment, portfolios, retellings, holistic scoring, and miscue analysis. *Windows into Literacy,* (Rhodes & Shankin, 1993) was the class textbook; additional readings were student selected from both books and journals on new literacy assessment methods as well as general readings on naturalistic assessment.

Based on their particular teaching situations, the participants implemented various assessment procedures. For example, one English teacher implemented performance assessment in her classes; a third grade teacher tried holistic scoring with students' research reports. Weekly, we discussed issues of concern and influences on teacher confidence as they implemented these new assessment methods in their classrooms. These discussions were often sparked by a participant response to a reading or after attempts at implementation. I took scratch notes during these discussion (Sanjek, 1990). The notes were later developed more fully into fieldnotes as I recorded my impressions and reflected on the week's class.

In addition to the fieldnotes, data were collected at the beginning of the class from a questionnaire which focused on participants' prior experiences with naturalistic assessment. An end of class interview with each participant was recorded and transcribed. The interview focused on what the participants thought they would do with

naturalistic assessment in the future and how they viewed new assessment procedures in terms of teacher empowerment, a strong theme which emerged from the class discussions and written explanations.

The participants also completed confidence rating and wrote narratives explaining their ratings five times throughout the semester. Several researchers have suggested an interrelationship between teachers' self-efficacy or confidence and the success of an educational innovation (Guskey,1988; Ohlhausen, Meyerson, & Sexton, 1992). The participants rated themselves on a 0 (least confident) to 9 (most confident) scale. They then wrote explanations for each rating. The narratives provided insights as to why a particular rating was given, what influenced the teachers' confidence, as well as what concerns the teachers had during the class. Table 1 presents the a summary of the data collected.

Insert Table 1 about here

Finally, the participants responded pre and post to the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ) (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987). This instrument identifies individual teachers' concerns about an educational innovation. The 35-item instrument is written generically so that the respondents may focus on a specific innovation; in this case, the participants considered naturalistic assessment as the educational innovation. The concerns are classified as either "self" (how an innovation affects a teacher personally) "task" (how an innovation affects classroom management and implementation); and "impact" (how an innovation affects students, collaboration with colleagues, and refocusing to adapt the innovation). Pre and post measures allowed for a comparison of change over the four months.

Data Analysis

The scoring of the SoCQ according to the procedures outlined in *Taking Charge of Change*(Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987) resulted in pre and post profiles for each participant. A group profile was developed using mean scores to determine any overall pattern of concerns.

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 1990) was used to analyze narrative data from the confidence explanations, interviews, and class discussion fieldnotes. By repeatedly reading the data, ten factors were identified as categories which influenced the participants and futher organized into four generic categories: *teacher uniqueness* (teacher mood/motivation, knowledge of procedures); *professional development* (conferences, university courses); *significant others* (students in their classes, administrators, colleagues); and *teaching situation* (opportunities to experiment, curricular demands, school district requirements). *Teaching situation* and *significant others* may be further refined into a core category: *teaching environment.*

Group Results

The results from the SoCQ, Figure 1, indicated that at the beginning of the class, most of the participants were concerned about acquiring accurate information on naturalistic assessment and how its implementation would personally affect them in their classroom or school. By the end of the class, most of the participants were concerned about the impact of naturalistic assessment on their students; several were concerned about collaboration with colleagues in their schools. This general shift in concerns from "self" to "impact" is typical of the developmental nature of concerns (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987).

Insert Figure 1 about here

The confidence ratings showed that the participants, in general, were confident in their own abilities to implement naturalistic assessment at the beginning of the class (mean 6.2) and even more so at the end of the class (mean 8.9). The general high level of confidence at the beginning of the class may be attributed to their prior courses and experiences in the classroom. The interviews and written narratives further clarified their confidence ratings; they tended to rise after the teachers had been successful with a new method or procedure. Of note is the fact that there were individual dips in

confidence over the four month period; these dips are best understood when the participants are viewed as individuals

A major theme emerged from all the data sources: empowerment. This theme was interrelated to the generic categories identified as influencing teacher confidence. If the teaching environment was supportive, with administrators or colleagues encouraging the teachers to experiment, the participants felt confident and empowered. When too many curricular demand and school district requirements prevented teachers from experimenting, coupled with non supportive colleagues and/or administrators, the participants felt restricted and less confident. Through class discussions and narratives, it was obvious that the participants were confident in their own abilities to use naturalistic assessment successfully in their classrooms. They felt more professional when they chose the procedures to use to determine student progress. Martha, a primary grade teacher stated:

> With alternative assessment, I don't feel like someone is coming into my classroom and saying to me: 'Well, this is what you need to do and this is what has to be done'. Instead, they are saying: 'You're a professional and you know best for the students, therefore, you have the freedom to do what is needed'.

The participants also saw naturalistic assessment as empowering students as well as themselves. They described the effect naturalistic assessment had on their students in terms of involvement and ownership. Frank, a middle school English teacher, echoed much of the group's sentiments:

> By being able to use naturalistic assessment I feel much more comfortable in the classroom. I feel that I'm able to reach out help and kids more on an individual basis then I ever could before. I'm able to alleviate a lot of that tension because I'm basing their evaluation on what the kids are capable of doing and what they doing within those capabilities. The biggest asset of naturalistic assessment is that I don't have to have a class criteria; I have an individual criteria and

> I have individual standards. That's one part. Another part is it provides me with a much more relaxed environment in the classroom. The kids aren't afraid to come in the classroom. Research tells us that the environment plays a big part in how well the kids are going to learn. That's another big plus of naturalistic assessment; it lets you provide a freer kind of environment. We don't always have to answer the questions at the chapter. We can do things like a discussion. We can do things like a presentation. We can make collages and projects that represent learning. We can use different parts of our talents.
>
> We have to ask ourselves as teachers: What do we want, what are we looking for? Are we looking for an easy way to find out whether these kids may have comprehended something or are we interested in expanding the kids understanding to where they can show us symbolism.

The participants were not confident, however, about the success of naturalistic assessment in their school and school district. Participants often asked during class discussions: "How can we convince parents, district level administrators, members of the school board, and the general public to let go of standardized tests? How can we use portfolios and not still have to use the traditional report cards?" The nine teachers felt somewhat powerless to influence district level administrators and school board members in a way that district wide change in assessment procedures would occur.

Thomas, the principal, however, had a different perspective. At his building level, he had introduced naturalistic assessment procedures to his faculty and was working with his teachers as they progressed through the change process. He also was involved in an assessment task force which included parents, members of the business community, and high level district decision-makers. Thomas felt he was in a position to influence decisions at the district level but was frustrated by the resistance he faced primarily from the district decision-makers. Through class discussions, he intimated that there was some movement toward more openness to naturalistic assessment but there was little chance in the near future that naturalistic level would replace the established standardized testing policies already in place at the district level.

Individual Results - Two Portraits

Individual portraits were developed for each participant. Two teachers are presented here as examples of the importance of a supportive teaching environment and its interrelationship with empowerment.

Martha is a primary grade teacher who has taught for four years. Her teaching assignment during 1993-1994 was a combination first and second grade class. Martha had previously taken a course in whole language and had attended many inservices at her school. She stated that she works in a very supportive environment; her principal encouraged the use of portfolios which were transferred year to year with the students. At the beginning of the class, Martha's SoCQ revealed her main concern to be collaboration with colleagues (Fig. 2). This concern intensified at the end of the semester.

Insert Figure 2 about here

The interviews and narratives revealed that while naturalistic assessment was part of her school and that all teachers used portfolios, from Martha's perspective, she and her colleagues had been "just on the surface level" and that there was much more to new assessment procedures than she thought at first. Martha's confidence ratings were 7, 5, 6, 6, and 7. She attributed the dip in confidence from the first to last rating to her reexamination of her own classroom uses of portfolios as a result of reading the text and journal articles as well as her attempt to use rubrics to evaluate student writing. At the end of the class she stated:

> I still don't feel 100% confident but in a way I'm glad. I am very much aware of the fact that you can't have total confidence in something until you do it. Right now I can say I'm confident enough to give new assessment forms a try.

Martha looked forward to refining the use portfolios in her classroom next year. She was eager to share her new knowledge of rubrics with colleagues at her school. As

stated previously, Martha saw naturalistic assessment as an empowering innovation. She had worked to gain knowledge, experimented in her own classroom, and was confident in her own abilities. By teaching at a school where both the principal and colleagues supported naturalistic assessment, Martha's confidence was validated and success became a given.

Diane is a middle school reading and English teacher who taught for three years. She stated during a class discussion that while she taught in a middle school her principal and colleagues continued to embrace a junior high school perspective. They were traditional in the approaches to instruction and assessment and had made little progress toward an integrated curricular model used in many middle schools. Diane's principal allowed her to experiment but had no particular commitment to naturalistic assessment.

Diane's preservice education was holistic in nature; she felt that she didn't need to "change beliefs much, just needed to know more about" naturalistic assessment. Diane used checklists as an assessment tool and was attempting, for the first time, to use student portfolios. Diane's pre SoCQ showed that she was, indeed, most concerned with "self" as shown by the awareness, information, and personal high scores (Fig. 3). Throughout the semester Diane focused on learning more about naturalistic assessment through reading various articles, a textbook on evaluating writing, and keeping a double entry journal in which she reflected upon key points in her reading. As Figure 3 shows, the "self" scores dropped on the post SoCQ as did the task (management) score. These changes may be attributed to both Diane's confidence with her new knowledge as well as her classroom success with portfolios. Two of the three scores related to impact rose on the post test. Diane became increasingly concerned about the consequences of naturalistic assessment in terms of aligning instruction and assessment. She stated, "I would like to begin to use it for adapting my instruction to match students' needs and for students to see their own progress." Diane was also concerned about collaboration with her colleagues; she felt professionally responsible to "go out and teach the other teachers at school and hope they're willing to listen and willing to change."

Insert Figure 3 about here

Diane's confidence ratings were 5,6,7,8, and 9; they displayed a steady increase over the four months. Her written explanations focused on the personal concerns and validated the large "self" change from the beginning to the end of the class on the SoCQ. She explained her last confidence rating:

> I feel confident in my ability to use naturalistic assessment in my own classroom because I feel safe experimenting there. I know I still have a lot to learn but I feel that I can do it. Attitude affects confidence and I feel that as long as I am willing to find out more about naturalistic assessment that my confidence in using it will remain strong.

At the post interview Diane told me that she would be going to a high school next year. She would be teaching with another participant in a school which openly supported naturalistic assessment. While Diane was anxious to work with older students she felt that her non-supportive colleagues and indifferent principal at the middle school influence greatly her decision to move to a new school.

Discussion

While no attempt is made to generalize to the population of teachers using naturalistic assessment, this study provided insights into how individual educators cope with educational change and innovations. The findings of this study suggest that in order for changes to occur in assessment on a large scale, individual teachers must be supported throughout the change process and their concerns acknowledge and addressed. Support for some teachers may mean the presence of just one other colleague who shares the same perspective; for others, support may need to be complete administrative endorsement and encouragement. The individual portraits showed how teachers differ in their concerns for naturalistic assessment as an educational innovation. These differences must be addressed over time as teachers pass through the various stages. The teachers in this study felt personally empowered by naturalistic assessment but were not professionally at a point where they felt could greatly influence decision-makers. For these participants, district wide change may be sparked when more teachers take political action through their professional organizations. In addition, as more teacher education programs incorporate naturalistic assessment procedures into methods and

measurement courses, future teachers will enter the classroom empowered with the knowledge of naturalistic assessment. Taken together, naturalistic assessment and teacher empowerment may well become the cornerstone for restructuring our schools.

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Table 1

Summary Data for Participants

Name	Level	Yrs. Exper.	Confidence Ratings 1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
Diane	middle	03	5	6	7	8	9
Ada	elementary	12	8	7	7	7	8
Rebecca	middle	06.5	4	4	7	7	8
Frank	middle	04	6	6	6	8	9
Thomas	elementary	10	3	3	4	6	7
Martha	elementary	04	7	5	6	6	7
Kate	secondary	11	7	7	7	7	7
Kelly	elementary	10.5	7	7	7	7	8
Helen	secondary	04	9	7	7	9	9
Toni	secondary	05	6	6	7	8	8

	Awareness	Informational	Personal	Management	Consequence	Collaboration	Refocusing
PRE	55.60	75.00	73.00	50.90	65.80	78.30	55.10
POST	48.70	58.40	62.80	53.40	69.60	82.00	56.10

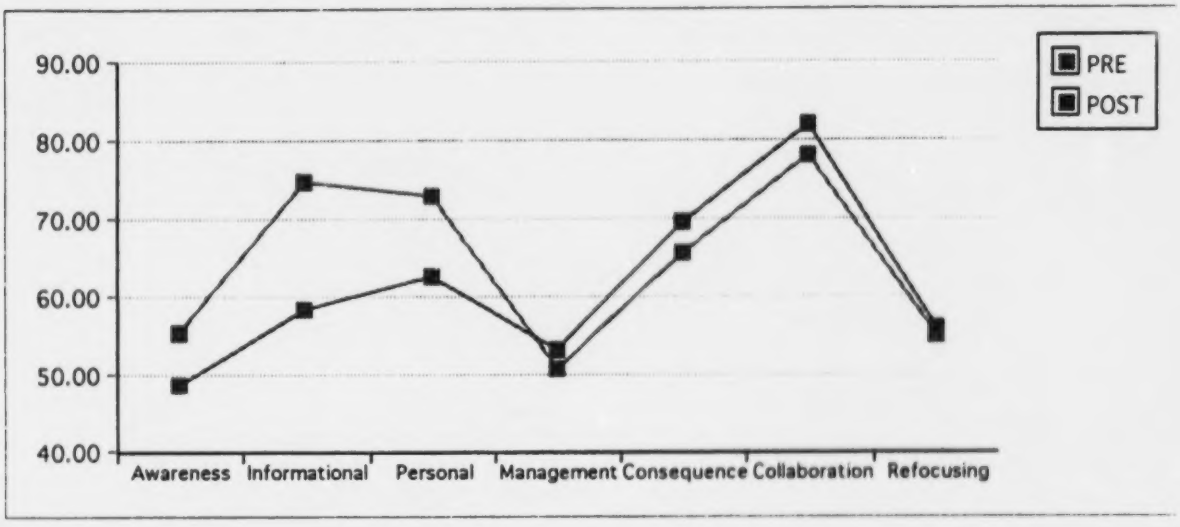

Figure 1. Group pre and post Stages of Concern profile

	Awareness	Informational	Personal	Management	Consequence	Collaboration	Refocusing
PRE	10	5	28	18	24	84	34
POST	37	12	39	39	33	97	38

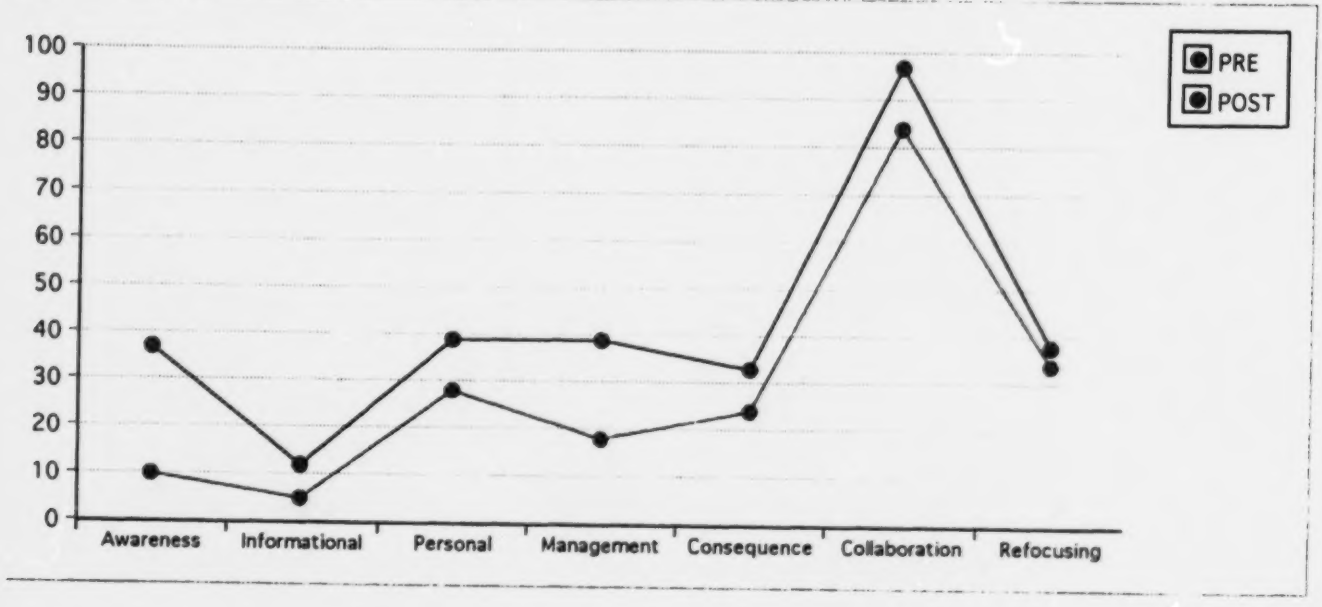

Figure 2. Martha's pre and post Stages of Concern profile

	Awareness	Informational	Personal	Management	Consequence	Collaboration	Refocusing
PRE	77	75	85	69	38	64	60
POST	37	45	55	27	71	84	60

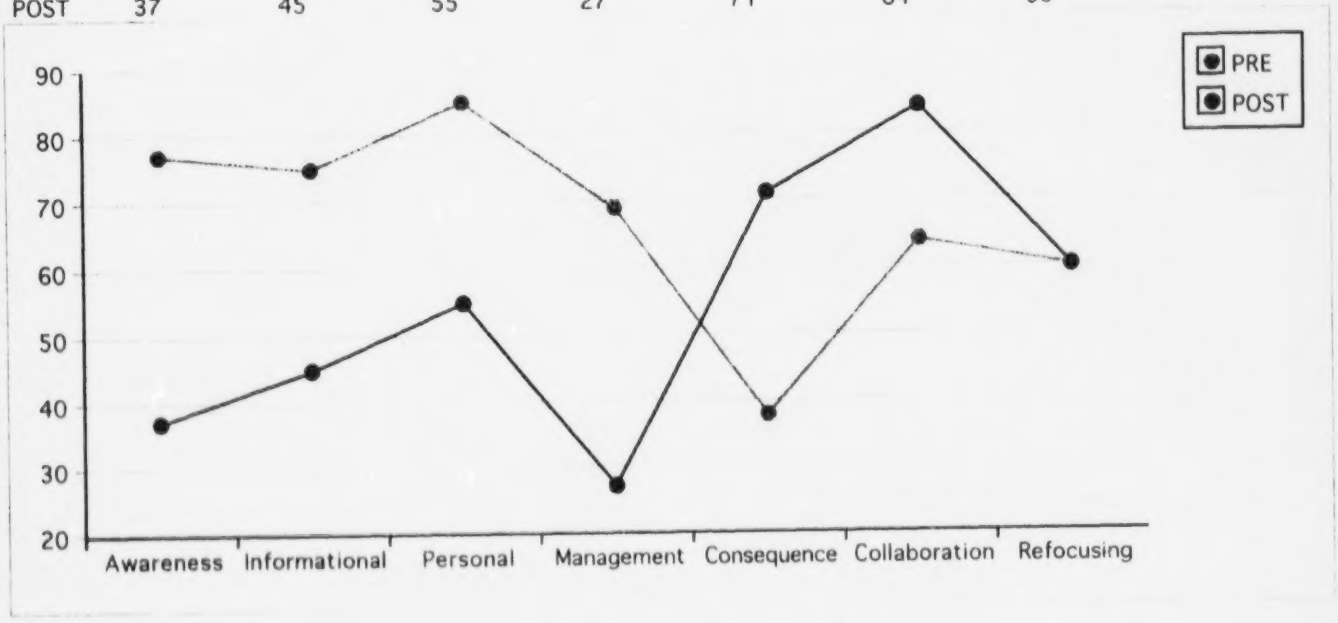

Figure 3. Diane's pre and post Stages of Concern profile